

Dover District Council
Little Stour and Ashstone Ward
2022 Annual Parish Meeting Report

Community:

Last year was of course the second year of covid but it felt very different from DDC's perspective. In the first year we were scrambling to put together support for individuals and organisations most heavily effected and built up valuable working relationships with a wide variety of official and voluntary organisations. In this second year we were continuing to work with these contacts but also acting as the administrator of a range of grants from central Government and other bodies. One example was the Household Support Fund. This amounted to £171,826 and was conveyed to us from the Government via KCC. This supported two foodbanks, two Age Concern branches, the Friends of Age UK, the Citizens' Advice Bureau and the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol which benefited rough sleepers during the coldest weather.

The grants also included the Welcome Back Fund for businesses, Town Centre and Green Energy grants and other Covid-related grants.

DDC's own Community Grants provided over £71,000 to 81 local organisations in the summer round and over £119,000 to 101 groups in the winter round. The organisations in our ward that benefited were: Ash PCC, Preston Cricket Club, Westmarsh Village Hall, Staple PCC, Staple Wildlife Friendly Village Project, Ash Village Hall, Ash Cartwright and Kelsey PTFA, Wingham Football Club and Goodnestone Village Hall. In addition the DDC Lotto realised £40,000 this year for distribution to local groups, making a total of £100,000 since its launch.

Waste Collection:

A major issue of concern to residents in the first half of the year was the re-organisation from April of waste collections by our contractor, Veolia. This can only be described as a disaster, which led to totally unacceptable levels of service and, for a few weeks, the suspension of garden waste collections. Following 'full and frank' discussions at the highest level with Veolia and its French parent company the situation was largely rectified by the autumn, but it is something we will have to keep a very close eye on going forward.

Street Lighting:

A major project this year was the investment of £1 million in the replacement of 2750 street lights across the District with LED bulbs. This has been completed and provides energy saving benefits as well as a better quality of lighting.

Social and Affordable housing:

We have continued our programme of building, buying or adapting affordable or social housing homes. We have a target of 500 dwellings by 2025 and are halfway to this.

Regeneration

We have made good progress on a number of projects:

The Dover Market Square improvements, where we have been working with the Dover Town Team, are well underway. These will incorporate a water feature and we hope this will make the area an attractive place to shop and relax in, just adjacent to the St James Centre.

Work started in February on the Dover Fastrack Bus Scheme. This has been largely funded by Homes England and will link the new housing development at the old Connaught Barracks with Whitfield, Dover Town Centre and Dover Priory station. It will involve the construction of a new bridge across the A2, dedicated to pedestrians, cyclists and the buses, which will be all-electric, and the service is expected to open in Summer/Autumn 2023.

The £9.1 million work on the re-awakening of Maison Dieu, Dover Town Hall has started, funded by the National Lottery. This is a wonderfully impressive building but has become totally unsuitable for modern day usage. The restoration involves painstaking work by a variety of experts. In September this year a time capsule will be buried nearby, and suggestions are being taken from schools, organisations and individuals on what should be included to reflect life in Dover District in 2022.

Tides in Deal is nearing the end of its life and has become very expensive to maintain. A Project Advisory Group has been formed to oversee its replacement. Inevitably there will be some tension between the facilities we would ideally like to provide and the funds available.

In the autumn, at the end of the main tourist season, we will be upgrading the Sandwich Guildhall forecourt, which is not very pedestrian friendly. As well as funding from DDC we have support from the Royal and Ancient as a legacy of the Open in Sandwich in 2021.

Climate change: DDC has made a commitment to make its activities carbon-neutral by 2030, and a steering group is guiding this. One early example of initiatives is the installation of 46 electric charging points across the District during last year.

Local Plan: Although delayed by the pandemic the development of the District Local Plan is gradually moving forward. Despite all the difficulties associated with the consultation process because of Covid we have been very pleased with the level of response. There will be a final round of consultation during the summer and we hope to present the Plan to the Inspectorate in early 2023.

Finance: Finally, on the finance front, we have maintained a balanced budget across the pandemic with no cuts in services. In this coming year the DDC element in the total council tax bill, approximately 10% of the total, will rise by 2.5%. We remain the lowest council tax authority in East Kent. This year's budget includes a smoothing allocation of £4 million to cope with any unexpected shocks in the post-pandemic (and post war) world.

As always your DDC councillors will do their best to serve our residents. We cannot promise to deliver all that is requested but we are always contactable when needed.

Trevor Bartlett and Mike Conolly, April 2022